

# DRAMA



J. W. Lambert, Harold Hobson  
E. Martin Browne, Margaret Jowett  
A. L. Pattisson, Donagh MacDonagh  
Janet Leeper, Robert Speaight  
John Allen, Norman Marshall

1954  
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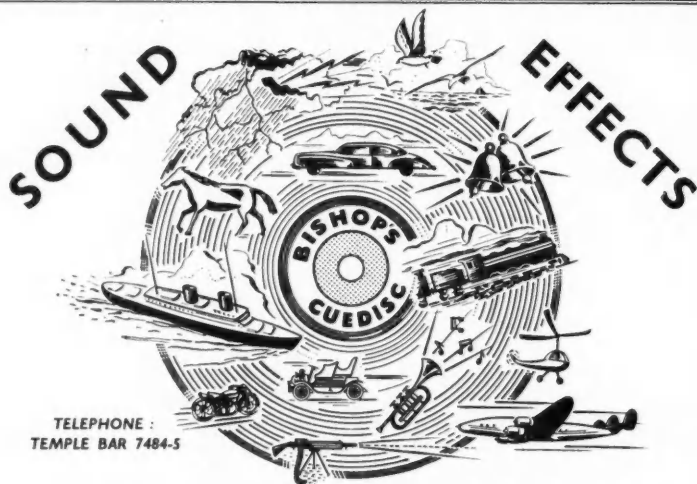
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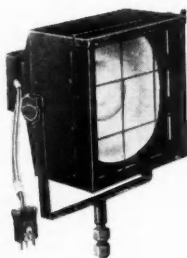
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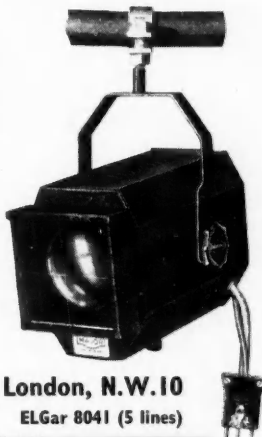
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# DRAMA

## *The Quarterly Theatre Review*

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NEW SERIES

SUMMER 1954

NUMBER 33

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"THE TEMPEST" at the Old Vic. Richard Burton as Caliban, Michael Hordern as Prospero, and Claire Bloom as Miranda. Produced by Robert Helpmann. Photograph by Angus McBean.

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# EDITORIAL

SUMMER nowadays for the Arts is the season of Festivals and in the last few years they have greatly enriched the British scene. This growth has been spontaneous and individual; each has had its struggles, but now that they have come to stay it is time for the theatre to take stock of its own contribution to the Festivals and see how it accords with their character and purpose.

Before the war, the few Festivals in England were of a specialised kind. Stratford-on-Avon was for Shakespeare, but in those days it was far too provincial in its celebration of the world's greatest dramatist. Canterbury was the creation of enlightened men of the Church but their successors have smothered this Festival, as happened also at Tewkesbury. Malvern was made for Shaw by that great patron Sir Barry Jackson, of whom Malvern itself proved unworthy. These were the pioneer Festivals.

Since the war a new type has flourished—the Festival of all the Arts. But to be successful, each Festival must take individual colour from the place in which it is held, and must in fact draw the bulk of its audience from its own locality. (The idea that Festivals subsist on visitors is an illusion.) It must also have an emphasis, a speciality of its own. Stratford, besides raising Shakespearian production to the highest level, has made itself a centre for an intellectual holiday: the Shakespeare Institute is there to provide lectures and facilities for study; the ancient buildings are presented as living history. York uses its famous Mystery Plays as focus for a finely chosen programme of the arts on an appropriately modest scale. Pitlochry is a summer holiday in Scotland's finest country with a seven-play repertory as the chief artistic attraction. North Devon's new Taw and Torridge Festival has a dramatist and librettist, Ronald Duncan, as its moving spirit. Edinburgh alone, that truly gigantic achievement among Festivals, displays all the arts to the full.

Yet Edinburgh illustrates very well the theatrical problem of Festivals. What is shown at a Festival must be of fine quality: it should also be distinctive to its own Festival. But the very few performances which can be given cannot pay production costs, however complete the success. At Edinburgh, a London management is asked to stage the plays, which must be chosen with an eye on a subsequent run. From time to time, a play suitable for both purposes is found and an "occasion" is successfully created; as for instance the opening of T. S. Eliot's two latest plays. But the problem recurs each year, and is even greater for the small Festivals: how to get the right plays in productions of high quality?

There is no easy answer. The existence of some companies playing true repertory and able to stage an interesting addition to their stock of plays for the first time at a Festival would go a long way towards providing one, but the most powerful attraction to a Festival will probably always be the local creation, such as the York Mystery Plays. In time, contemporary work of this indigenous kind may develop: Edinburgh began to foster Scottish productions with Guthrie's brilliant *Thrie Estates*. Meanwhile the Festivals are so important to our theatre that many efforts and sacrifices will be worth making to establish a movement which presents so delightfully the best that Britain has to offer.

# PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE

By J. W. LAMBERT

ONE of the innumerable minor pleasures of the theatre lies in watching this erratic institution adapting itself to changing mental climates; not without many a shiver and a good deal of puffing and blowing, especially when ideas rather than emotions make up the two hours' traffic. The difficulty is always to embody them in human personality without swamping it; and perhaps it is no wonder that, of three recent pieces which may claim to be plays of ideas, *The Burning Glass* should be the most obviously popular.

Its creative technique is skilful, its handling of ideas—well, shall we say restrained? Charles Morgan has chosen a theme of terrifying urgency—man's ever-increasing power to manipulate natural forces, and the moral responsibilities of scientists. He has expressed it through a set of representative figures: the scientist who is also a man of good will—presented by Michael Goodliffe with intelligent sincerity, despite his tendency to goggle in moments of stress; the young nihilist whose balance has been upset by personal strain and suffering—another of Michael Gough's studies of Peter Pan with a cloven hoof, but this time bringing a not unwelcome rough edge into the country-house drawing-room, all roses and eighteenth-century seascapes; the force of blind disruption in the person of a rootless, parasitic refugee intellectual—a brilliantly twisted portrait by Robert Speaight; of traditional order and authority in the Prime Minister—shaped by Laurence Naismith with real power but a distracting excess (even if it is home-grown) of badger-like beard; of Christian values and the *ewig weibliche* in the scientist's mother and wife.\*

All these figures, or at least all the male figures, come alive upon the stage; they are recognisably human

beings, not merely symbols. Nevertheless *The Burning Glass* falls short of excellence. The fault, to my mind, lies partly in the writing—there is something about Mr. Morgan's self-conscious culture which suggests false values somewhere, and something distasteful about the way in which the sympathetic characters keep buttering each other up; but much more in the working out of the plot. Having clearly stated his tremendous theme Mr. Morgan abandons it\* in favour of a passable thriller about the kidnapping of the scientist, punctuated by tiresome secular sermons from the Prime Minister. We have a right to feel cheated.

Cheated is hardly the word for the emotions aroused by *The White Countess*; this curious work was greeted in London with such obloquy, and disappeared with such rapidity, that it has naturally given the impression of being, as they say on Lloyds, a total loss. In fact, however, it is a good play thrown away. Jacquetta Hawkes and J. B. Priestley had something true to say about the nature of woman and the awakening of the human spirit. But how two highly intelligent people came to set down on paper, much less bring to the theatre, such a mixy-maxy of high-flown balderdash ("You belong nowhere and everywhere") and the dregs of a hundred outworn costume dramas ("Où, mon Général") must remain a matter for dazed conjecture.

Mr. Morgan keeps his characters human but dodges his own ideas; Mr. and Mrs. Priestley stick to their ideas but present them through characters cardboard throughout. That provoking and extremely stimulating young dramatist, John Whiting, gets the best

\* He continues the discussion not, alas, upon the stage but in a preface, "On Power over Nature," to the published version of the play (*Macmillan, 9s. 6d.*).

or the worst of both worlds: his characters, though arrant symbols, take on by fits and starts the shreds and patches of humanity; and his ideas, which are legion, are certainly not

is a broken shell of ineffective warm-heartedness, and by an exquisitely suave politician. Back into her life comes a defeated general, who no longer loves her but is attracted by a



PENELOPE MUNDAY and ROBERT FLEMYNG in John Whiting's new play, "Marching Song," produced by Frith Banbury, at St. Martin's Theatre. Photograph by Angus McBean.

dodged, though I very much doubt whether he himself has much control over them. In *Marching Song* a mature woman, beautiful, poised, intelligent, perhaps represents civilisation; she is attended by a doctor and a priest, both down at heel, by a film producer who

wary waif of a girl called, with a too obvious label, Morgen. In her, life seems to beckon to him once more, in spite of the memory of his own frightful cruelty and his disillusion—both, incidentally, brought home to us in magnificently effective passages; but, as much

for her sake as his own, he turns away.

That at least is my shot at a simplification of this very complex play; and put like that it looks, I must admit, a good deal less impressive than it sounds in the theatre, though even there it does not wholly succeed, because

air of a puppet; and in this defect he was seconded by Penelope Munday as the narrow-trousered, cropped-haired waif from the ruins (both were very possibly playing loyally to Frith Banbury's direction). Miss Munday, though clearly a promising actress, had not the



ROBERT CARTLAND, MICHAEL GWYNN and DOROTHY TUTIN in "I am a Camera," by John van Druten at the New Theatre. Photograph by Angus McBean.

watching it is too much like doing a difficult crossword puzzle. Nor was it much helped by the performance. Robert Flemyng composed a striking portrait of the soft-cored militarist, but his angular movements and monotonous cadences themselves lent him rather the

strength to maintain the emotional tension required. Even Diana Wynyard, called upon to embody handsomely negative potentialities, fell at times into a kind of chant; and it was left to Ernest Thesiger and Hartley Power, as the politician and the film producer, to



overcome their own significance and present rounded human beings.

*I am a Camera*, John van Druten's adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's Berlin chronicles, consists of a series of quite brilliant snapshots. It puts something of a *matinée-play* gloss upon the fine texture of its originals, but its re-creation of life in a tatty Berlin lodging-house in 1930 produces farce and pathos and a sense of impending disaster in neat scene after neat scene. It poses also a nice point of theatrical procedure: where does one draw the line between monotonous type-casting and forcing a player to act doggedly against the grain? Dorothy Tutin, as the indeterminately upper-class English girl, Sally Bowles, going obsessively to the bad, gives a splendid performance: she is brittle and bright in her gewgaws and green finger-nails; she is immensely courageous in pursuit of dissipation and in facing its consequences; her little pointed face shines in squalor. Yet it is impossible not to feel that though this is fine, yet it is wholly manufactured acting—an interesting step in Miss Tutin's career, an encouraging example of what she can do when miscast, but after all a feat of character construction rather than of character creation. Michael Gwynn, on the other hand, as the hesitant, fussy, kindly, yet essentially detached Isherwood, crinkles and bumbles to perfection; and three of the supporting parts bring forward players new to me giving performances of the highest quality: Marianne Deeming as a fat, kind, stupid landlady reveals in a few lines the whole tragedy of the German people's acceptance of Nazism; Renée Goddard as a wealthy Jewess spins out a heartrending thread of pathos; and Robert Cardland contributes a smoothly characterised, deeply felt portrait of a playboy at odds with his own conscience. And, knitting his fragments together, Mr. van Druten's production modulates with admirable sureness from mood to mood.

An American play of absolutely no

interest, *The Fifth Season*, has served to introduce us to a pleasing Jewish comedian, Joseph Buloff, who embodies all the expansive charity of his kind. An English play about the marriage of little Lord Faunteroy, *Angels in Love*, at least provided the opportunity for a fine piece of rugged old-style character-acting from Kynaston Reeves and a startling piece of shock-headed *grotesquerie* from Peter Reynolds. *I Capture the Castle* . . . what can I say of this, that will not be struck out by a prudent editor? Awkward in its construction, nauseating in its falsity even considered as a fairy-tale, this interminable stretch of whimsy drew from Virginia McKenna a perfectly fitting portrayal of shameless winsomeness, and caused my heart to bleed for that engaging actor George Relph, who, as a genius understandably stifled by his insufferable family, looked as embarrassed on the stage as I felt in the audience.

Let us take leave of the new plays more cheerfully by laying a small tribute at the feet of Robert Morley. We all, I think, tend to take this magnificent clown too much for granted. *Hippo Dancing*, we say . . . ah yes, a delightful romp with Morley up to all his tricks, and leave it at that. Yet this is in fact an extremely good play; in adapting Roussin Mr. Morley has softened, certainly, but he has not distorted, and the result is a first-rate farcical comedy with its roots firmly in human nature. Zena Howard, in her one big scene, takes charge of the play, the audience and Mr. Morley; and the great Hippo himself, the blundering epitome of the suburban Englishman in his own home, not only roars, mutters, stamps, expands, collapses, sticks out his lower lip, shrugs his shoulders and all but stands on his head, but does so for long, delicious moments in the company of Wilfrid Hyde White, his perfect foil, as thin as the other is fat, as quiet as the other is noisy, but never for an instant overpowered.

Tennent's have made a bold bid to establish *Charley's Aunt* as a classic—

presumably for want of anything better to do—in a sumptuous production; and since Sir John Gielgud managed to construct an extremely funny evening round an actor who is not what I should call a natural comedian—John Mills—they may be said to have succeeded. A production, at the Arts, of its old friend *The Private Secretary* was remarkable chiefly for the fact that Cattermole, constantly referred to in the text (which was unaltered) as being a very fat man, was played by a very thin one; nobody seemed to mind. But the next three productions at the Arts, though inevitably uneven in effect, were of great interest. John Fernald directed Gaston Baty's version of *Crime and Punishment* quite excellently; he was greatly helped by the ingenious settings of Ronald Brown. No version of this vast and crowded work can do more than provide illustrations of key incidents, but this was finely done; and Kenneth Griffith, small, ragged, nagging and aggressive, perfectly caught the nature of that shoddy little spiritual fraud, Raskolnikov. Then came a version of Lorca's *Blood Wedding*; another chance of seeing this highly charged poem was very welcome, even in a poor translation and, not to mince matters, a painfully inadequate performance. English players are never at home among the peasantry, and the Spanish farm people in Peter Hall's otherwise fluid and intense production were quite absurdly genteel in voice and gesture. Only Lionel Jeffries' slow, suspicious, head-shaking, not unkindly old father seemed really to speak from the soil with power and penetration. Both these qualities he displayed again in an excellent adaptation by Maurice Valency of Giraudoux's *Intermezzo*, at the Arts called *The Enchanted*. As a doctor possessed of intimations of immortality Mr. Jeffries carried off, with his domed El Greco-like head and noble voice, several very difficult moments. It is true that he played at a crawl, but then it was clearly John Fernald's policy to wring out every

drop of Giraudoux's strangely Teutonic fantasy of innocence and worldliness. Only in the last act did this patchy play shake off the shade of third-rate Barrie, when Emrys Jones, as a young clerk with a philosophy of his own, and Valerie Hanson, as the rather regrettable little dreamer half in love with a ghost, charmed their way through a superb proposal scene which at last merged into a riotous finale (no other word will serve).

The last two productions of the Old Vic season met with very general praise, in the case of *Coriolanus* well deserved. This prickly piece requires bold handling, and got it in Michael Benthall's hands. The mob was perhaps unnecessarily caricatured, but the hard, clear light of the greater part of the play exposed most tellingly the brash hatreds and cold revenges of those rebarbative Romans, giving way to an impressively shadowed doom-laden air at the moment of Coriolanus' death. None the less it was, I think, a mistake to lop the end of the play; the dying fall and slow anticlimax were intended, here as in *Hamlet*; to contrive to end on a high note where the original does not is in the theatre as in the opera house merely vulgar. Fay Compton, somewhat bedizened in very high Roman fashion, made an abundantly imperious Volumnia, William Squire a dryly incisive Menenius. Richard Burton's splendid Coriolanus embodied, without a tiresome excess of scowls or curling lips, but with a slow and warning smile, the brutal, obtuse and childish arrogance of the inconstant tyrant. This was his best part in a season during which he has worked extremely hard; it was a pity that at its close he should have blotted his copybook with a performance of Caliban which was a lamentable piece of perfunctory fooling. About everything else in *The Tempest* a good deal of trouble had evidently been taken: but not, I felt, to very much purpose. Because of the accursed Marble Arch which straddled the stage, most of

Robert Helpmann's striking stage pictures remained invisible to me. But I could see all too clearly the dancers he introduced into the masque—graduates, presumably, from one of Joyce Grenfell's dimmer academies,

depended upon Prospero. Michael Hordern's approach was stern and rather cool; but only a little too much vehemence—and almost everybody in the production shouted most of the time—or perhaps a shade too little



PETER WYNGARDE and VALERIE HANSON in Giraudoux's "The Enchanted," produced by John Fernald at the Arts Theatre. Photograph by John Vickers.

who undulated about waving wraps in tasteful pastel shades. The unfortunate Ariel, too—Robert Hardy, a substantial sprite—was required to strike and hold a number of agonising poses, many of which made him look like a newly-hatched cuckoo. In the end, all

confidence in his own powers prevented Mr. Hordern from investing the crotchety old fellow with the mantle of a true magician, casting, as the evening wore slowly on, his spells over us as well as over his much-trying friends and relations.

# CHRISTIANS ON THE STAGE

By HAROLD HOBSON

THE attack on Christianity has now reached its second stage.

Even in the nineteenth century its historical basis was by no means universally accepted. Many people did not believe in the Virgin birth of Jesus and if they admitted his crucifixion they denied both his miracles and his ascension. But few or none of these questioned his ethical teaching. They may have rejected his rising from the dead, but they said nothing against the principles of the Sermon on the Mount.

Those principles are now, however, being increasingly and openly flouted. To this movement the war, of course, gave a great impetus. In war one naturally enough is preoccupied by the problem of survival; even the best of us become less and less scrupulous about the means. I recall a luncheon during the war at which a distinguished Allied general delivered a short address. The chairman had introduced him by saying that the Allies intended to wage war by every means compatible with honour and Christianity. The General rose and said: "I wish to deny every word that has just been spoken. We shall wage war, certainly; and to get victory there is no dishonour to which we will not sink, no foulness we shall hesitate to commit." And he added, "Just to show you that I mean what I say, I would like to inform you that the last thing I did before coming to this lunch was to order a man to be assassinated."

It is stupid and perhaps hypocritical to condemn this soldier's plain statement of the attitude that has to be taken up in wartime. If one enters a war, that war has got to be won. The proper thing to do, of course, is to see that wars do not start. The point I wish to make, however, is somewhat different from this. It is merely that the world is coming increasingly to question or to

discard, not only the religious basis of Christianity, but also its moral teachings. These are intellectually attacked by, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre; and they are contravened by the innumerable films that glorify brutality and animal strength.

It would seem, therefore, that the future of Christianity is far from bright. But, fortunately, to suppose that tendencies continue indefinitely to develop in a straight line is a historical error. When the Turks captured Constantinople it appeared that they would take all Europe; when Napoleon won the battle of Austerlitz it seemed improbable that his Empire would not go on expanding for ever. Yet neither of these things happened.

There is evidence too that the movement towards infidelity has lost something of its impetus: or at least that it is changing direction. If a plausible case can still be made out for the argument that we are not much interested in Christianity, it cannot be denied that we are becoming more and more excited about Christians. The theatre is sufficient evidence of that. In the last three years a remarkable number of plays has been presented which deal with the problems of men and women who have specifically dedicated themselves to the religious life. T. S. Eliot's *Cocktail Party* was about a woman missionary, his *Confidential Clerk* about a young man destined for orders: in *A Priest in the Family* Kieron Tunney and John Synge examined the Irish passion for producing clergymen; W. Douglas Home's *The Bad Samaritan*, like Wynyard Browne's *The Holly and the Ivy*, was a sympathetic study of a parson; Graham Greene's *The Living Room* was the tragedy of a priest who, when the great opportunity of his ministry occurred, thought that he had failed, and Bridget Boland's *The Return*

told the story of a woman who discovered that she had lost her vocation, as the same author's *The Prisoner* presented a priest in great torment. These plays were not just light theatrical entertainment; at least six of them could claim to be serious studies of their subject; and it is surely significant that many of them achieved outstanding popularity. Some of them, in fact,

a woman's salvation; Hochwalder's *Sur la Terre comme au Ciel* and Bernanos's *Dialogue des Carmélites* show the reaction to persecution. Now these plays again were not done in a corner; some were presented in small enterprising theatres; but many of them, as in London, were produced in big and fashionable playhouses, and were more difficult to get into than the *Folies-Bergère*.



NOEL WILLMAN and ALEC GUINNESS in "The Prisoner" by Bridget Boland at the Globe Theatre. Photograph by Angus McBean.

were among the big successes of their year.

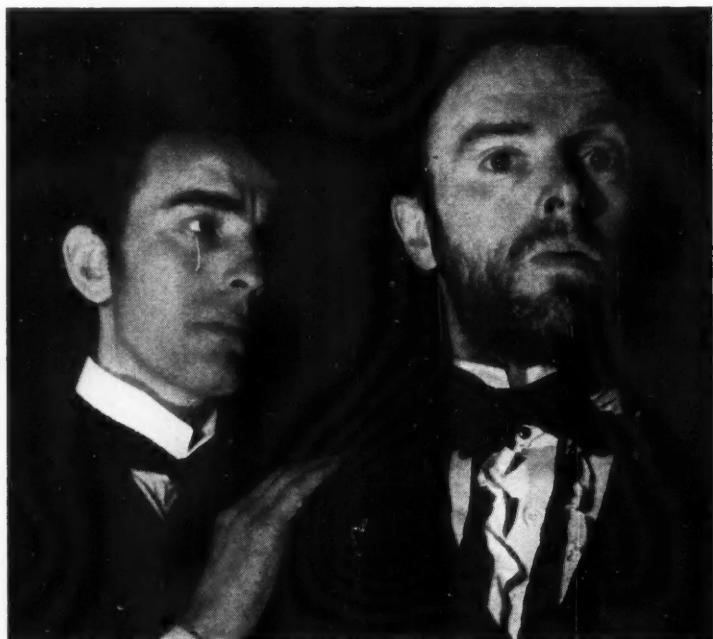
A similar story can be told of France. In Paris as in London both dramatists and public seem to be enormously interested in religious dilemmas and in religious characters. Claudel's *Partage de Midi* puts the problem of a man who felt that he had a vocation which God rejected; Graham Greene's *La Puissance et la Gloire* that of a priest in a hostile country; Julien Green's *L'Ennemi* gives us a priest unfrocked who is nevertheless and against his will the cause of

In these plays the dramatic emphasis on the whole overshadows the religious. There is however another kind of play which also influences Christianity. The Religious Drama Society is achieving impressive, indeed invaluable results, in encouraging the writing of specifically religious plays. There is no rivalry between the works called into being by the Religious Drama Society and such pieces of the commercial theatre as I have mentioned.

The question does however arise whether the writer of a play deliberately

intended to increase faith can find anything useful to him in the handling of the commercial plays I have listed. In these plays such religious teaching as they contain is indirect. In *The Living Room*, for example, Mr. Greene does not tell us that the official exponents of the religion he believes in can help those in distress. In fact he shows one

already convinced. The indirect suggestion is invariably more impressive and disturbing. I have read scores of articles in American newspapers more or less specifically maintaining that sooner or later Europe would be overrun from the East. But none of them gave me such a shiver as the remark of a Parisian art dealer (who had done



NICHOLAS AMER and KENNETH GRIFFITH in "Crime and Punishment" at the Arts Theatre. Photograph by Lidbrook.

such person apparently completely failing to give such help. But in this failure, a purely personal failure, there is implication that the religion itself would not fail, whatever the weaknesses of its preachers. Now this is altogether more subtle, and more effective, as propaganda, than would be any outright assertion of the universal efficiency of any church, whether Mr. Greene's or another's. For outright assertions breed contradictions except among the

very well during the German Occupation): "*Croyez-vous que les Russes achèteront de la peinture?*"

But, for this purpose, the principal thing about these plays is that they do not divide the world into good and bad, with all the good on the side of religion and all the bad against it. One's chief objection to Christopher Hassall's *Out of the Whirlwind* was the fact that its distinguished author was, if I may put it this way, so prejudiced against the



devil. It was obvious from the start that Mr. Hassall disliked his devil so much that he was doomed to fail from the beginning. The play therefore had no suspense; and it ended by creating a sort of perverse sympathy for the devil on the part of the audience. Now I do not mean that Greene, Green, Claudel, and Eliot compromise over what they believe to be the essentials of Christianity. They know clearly enough what is right and what is wrong. But they perceive also that right and wrong are often mixed up in the same people, and that characters who seem to be on their side are sometimes worse than those against them. Julien Green's priest, for example, is damned; the most urgently religious person in *The Living Room* is thoroughly unpleasant;

Claudel's man with a vocation has a heart like an icicle; and Eliot, whilst hinting in *The Cocktail Party* at the splendours of martyrdom, does not omit to make clear that a happy, worthy, and useful life can be lived without any religion at all. These authors do not make these admissions out of a desire to placate the opposition. They make them because of the intensity of their understanding and perception as dramatists. But the result is that they take the opposition successfully in the flank where a frontal attack would be violently repulsed. In other words, the most effective religious play is one which says everything that can be said against its own thesis; getting in with its objections, that is, before the audience can do so.

## OFF-CENTRE

By E. MARTIN BROWNE

IF you go along Broadway to look for the American theatre, you won't find it. Three years ago the last theatre on Broadway, the old Empire, was demolished. It was at 40th Street, which is below Times Square, the focus of the "bright lights." Those lights advertise not theatres but clothes or drinks, and a few super-cinemas compete with them in glitter. To find the theatres you must turn east or west into the cross-streets, which seem quite dim after the glare of Broadway; the light-sign of the house you are going to identify it for you but will scarcely lure you inside. Theatre, you feel, is only a minor part of America's Entertainment Industry. Round Piccadilly Circus theatres and cinemas make a fairly equal show, and Shaftesbury Avenue, with five theatres and a sixth overdue for restoration, is a real Theatre Street. The London Theatre is in the centre of things: in New York it is off-centre.

This is true not only of the buildings,

but in other respects as well. Theatre management in Britain is a stable business. Many firms and individual managers have a lifetime of solid experience behind them, and produce six, eight or ten plays a year in the West End besides tours. In a business so tricky and unpredictable this experience is literally priceless. One sees in America how much precious talent and money is wasted by the mistakes of inexperience. Theatre managements come and go, theatres change hands often, and most of the men in management do not devote their whole time to the theatre but combine it with other interests such as real estate. Only so, perhaps, can the huge costs of theatre production in New York be provided: but in the long run success depends more on management than on money.

The theatre is off-centre in the actor's life too. He cannot get a livelihood from the theatre alone, for it is too precarious. Until recently, he had



to choose between theatre and Hollywood, 3,000 miles apart. Now he can make up the necessary balance of his income in New York by means of television. Again the buildings symbolise the state of things: a TV show is in Radio City and TV companies have taken over a number of theatres. The actors' way of organising themselves has helped to relegate the theatre to an inferior position. In Britain, Actors' Equity has with wise foresight brought into its orbit each one of the mechanical media—films, radio, TV and now even the ice show. In America, each has its own separate union, and American Equity is finding that the claims of its rivals tend to deplete its membership. Fighting for its life it becomes more restrictive, and so the field of the theatre is further narrowed.

But we have been standing all this time in front of our "Broadway" theatre. When he gets inside, an Englishman finds a good many surprises. The house seems very shallow and broad—probably it has only one balcony. The fashionable tendency in the last few years has been to bring people as near to the stage as possible. The orchestra pit has vanished from most playhouses and the front row is so near that, as one actress said, you could spit into their laps. The stage also is broad and shallow: a proscenium opening of forty feet with a depth of about twenty is not uncommon. While this makes for intimacy it is very difficult to avoid a production looking flat, unless your play allows of a divided stage. A current production, *Tea and Sympathy*, directed by Elia Kazan, achieves a brilliant effect with a divided set of which one half is only nine feet deep.

The auditorium may be painted a very light colour with draperies to match. The mystery of the theatre seems to have quite disappeared. It is a place of cheerful relaxation. (What will happen if the play is serious? Perhaps it had better not be.) Some of the amenities of the English house are

not allowed by law: no bars, no smoking except in outer foyers with fireproof floors to which everyone makes a mad rush in the interval and (what a blessing for the actors!) no tea-trays at matinées.

Programmes are free, and this gives the Englishman a pleasant feeling of getting something for nothing. But this is an illusion. The ordinary stall, which is fifteen shillings in London, costs just double in New York—six dollars, which to the American (whose dollar buys him about five shillingworth of goods) is thirty shillings. If you go in for one of the new "divan" seats, luxuriously upholstered, it will cost you seven-eighths. (It would have been cheaper to pay for your programme!) If you want to see a smash-hit less than months ahead, you will have to go to a ticket-broker who charges not a fixed commission as in London, but a scarcity price—ten dollars at least. The result is that the theatre audience consists more and more of business guests of New York firms entertained on expenses. This is not a healthy tendency. But all in all the price of seats is not excessive for the risks run and the costs incurred, and until the backstage unions and their allies co-operate in reducing them they must remain where they are.

What sort of show will you find on the stage you are looking at? It's a matter of chance, not of policy. No management in New York has a policy, nor does it sponsor a particular type of play. In existing circumstances, it is only possible for a manager to take as it comes any play he believes will be a success. It is a pity, for up to the war there were managements with policies—the Theatre Guild and the Group Theatre for instance. Then there were also a good many American dramatists of the first class whereas now there are only a very few. The Playwrights' Company, formed a few years ago, was an attempt to foster new ones, but its discoveries are not numerous. We complain over here of a dearth of new



"THE REMARKABLE MR. PENNYPACKER" is the farcical-comedy hit of New York. Burgess Meredith plays the name-part, and is seen here with one of the two families which he has reared in different cities. A member of the other family is seen looking on. Alan Schneider, who was on the staff of the British Drama League's 1952 Summer School, directed the play. Photograph by John Erwin.

dramatists: it is just as great over there.

Of actors too there is a dearth, though not numerically of course. (Equity's unemployment figures are astronomical.) But of young actors with a good range and command of their job, there is a severe shortage. The reason is not far to seek; there is practically no professional theatre outside Broadway. Sitting in your New York "orchestra seat," you will learn to thank God for the Repertory Theatres of Britain. How can a young actor learn his job without them? In America, when he comes out of drama school where is he to go? There are a very few struggling "reps."; there is "summer stock" where he may be lucky enough to become for a few weeks "support" to the series of Broadway stars who repeat each week their

well-worn performances of old successes. And that is all. To eat he must go either to Hollywood or to T.V. and never meet an audience. Facing audience after audience in play after play—that, and that alone, can establish an actor. It is not Shaftesbury Avenue that makes our standard of acting so high to-day, it is the "reps." Every American actor knows that his country's theatre is sick for lack of them. Sick, but not dead—oh, far from dead! The love of the theatre is much too deep in America for that. One might rather say the American theatre is being reborn. The new baby is not on Broadway, nor on the road where only one theatre is intermittently open in a city of a million people. "Off-Broadway" experiments are far more difficult in America than here, but they happen. Good

Arena Stage work goes on in places as far apart as Washington and Dallas, Texas. The Universities and Colleges, some of them, are contributing new work to the theatre and what is more important they are creating an informed and importunate audience. As

Old Vic and Stratford but all over the country—take Birmingham's *Henry VI*, for instance, or the nation-wide success of Gielgud's *Wilde* or Clements's *Farquhar*. America cannot and will not follow or adapt European traditions, but out of their riches she can find the



MOTHER AND DAUGHTER in "The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker": Martha Scott discusses with Una Merkel her engagement to marry a minister, which precipitates the comic crisis of the play. Photograph by John Erwin.

that audience becomes more and more vocal, the theatre will find means to supply its demands.

The University theatre departments are providing also, by degrees, that knowledge of tradition on which good new art must be based. Tradition is blessedly alive for us not only at the

material with which to build a tradition of her own. If Stanislavsky is regarded almost absurdly as an idol now, what matter? His teaching, with that of many others, must be absorbed into the system of the American theatre: they provide the necessary inspiration for its maturing.

# TATE WILKINSON OF YORK

By MARGARET JOWETT

**D**URING the latter part of the eighteenth century the theatres of York and Hull were under the control of perhaps the most remarkable manager working outside London, Tate Wilkinson. He maintained a stock company comparable with a first-class modern repertory group, recognised the abilities of Sarah Siddons, John Kemble and Dorothy Jordan before they were famous, and left behind him memoirs which are full of information about all the principal figures of the English stage during his lifetime.

Wilkinson, born in 1739, was educated at Harrow, and altogether had a more respectable background than was usual in the eighteenth century theatre, but his father, who was His Majesty's Chaplain to the Savoy and Chaplain to the Prince of Wales, offended against Lord Hardwicke's marriage act. Dr. Wilkinson died or committed suicide, whilst awaiting transportation, and his penniless son refused the offers of friends to provide him with a commission and set out to support himself and his mother on the stage.

He had a great talent for mimicry and could catch the manner of any London actor or actress and sustain a whole part in that style with just enough difference for burlesque. After some months of near destitution, it was by his imitations that he began to make a reputation for himself in Dublin and London. During the next few years he was much involved with an even greater mimic, Samuel Foote, and with Garrick. Sometimes they were all working together, sometimes in antagonism, though Garrick liked to have them both under contract when he could, if only to prevent their parodying him elsewhere.

Then Wilkinson decided to leave the London theatres for the chief pro-

vincial ones, where he played leading parts in main plays and gave his imitations in the farces which followed them. During these years he became moderately prosperous and in this way he first came to York for six nights in 1763. The manager there, Mr. Baker, already knew him and was attached to the young actor. On Tate's fourth visit in 1766 there was a meeting of the leading citizens, after which they approached Wilkinson to see whether he would take over the management of the theatre which, although newly built, was said to be declining "with dirty scenes, dirty clothes, all dark and dismal." Mr. Baker, who was very old, was persuaded by a Mr. Tasker to give up much of the management to young Wilkinson. Then Tasker and Wilkinson settled the whole affair during a half hour's walk in the Minster!

Wilkinson admits that he was eager to be a manager. During the next year or two he lent the theatre £1,400 for the privilege, and he began to make it what he wished it to be, one of the leading theatres in the provinces. To do this, and to stabilise its position, he spent another £500 on getting patents by Act of Parliament, so that for twenty-one years the theatres of York and Hull would be licensed for the presentation of any type of entertainment. Without such patents a theatre could easily be closed or a company of actors driven from a town.

Until the death of Mr. Baker four years later, Tate Wilkinson could not do entirely as he pleased, particularly over the introduction of reforms which would give his actors a higher standing. It was the custom in York over benefit performances for the actor taking the benefit to go from house to house distributing bills and asking for support. After the performance he had to appear on the stage with his whole family and

humbly thank the audience for their attendance. Wilkinson was not accustomed to so much servility, and as soon as he had the authority to do it he ended these practices. Surprisingly, it was the actors who resented his reforms; they moaned that "the quality would not come," but his attitude raised the prestige of his theatre and the county families gave it more patronage rather than less.

It has been said that Tate Wilkinson forced his company to walk from town to town on the circuit, as strollers habitually did. This would have been quite contrary to his intention of giving his actors consequence, and it does not seem to be true. On a Sheffield playbill in 1782 patronage is solicited because "Mr. Wilkinson has the Expences of the whole Company to pay from Doncaster to Sheffield, and back again, it being a journey out of the usual rotation." This suggests that members of the company travelled at their own expense between towns within the usual circuit, and that the management paid the expenses of unusual journeys. It also fits with the account of Charles Mathews, a comedian who was with Wilkinson later. He says:—

In the course of the year certain removes occurred, such as a nine-mile journey from Pomfret to Wakefield, which many of the actors would walk, if the weather permitted, in summer. Tate, on such occasions, preceded them in his carriage, and on their arrival at a certain point of the road he would invite them to an excellent dinner, which he had ordered ready for their refreshment; and towards the whole of the performers, from the highest to the lowest, on these occasions, in manners and conduct, he would be a Chesterfield in all he said and did.

Tate Wilkinson was thirty-one when he took over complete control of the company, and until his death thirty-three years later there were no major changes in its administration. Although called the York Company it frequently played elsewhere, but it was in York from January to May while the county families occupied their town houses.

In summer it was difficult to fill the

ill-ventilated theatres, and Wilkinson took his company wherever it might manage to pay expenses—Leeds, Sheffield, Doncaster, Pontefract, Halifax, even up to Edinburgh and Newcastle. They returned to York in August for the Assize and Race Weeks, and then had a season in Hull from October or November until January. Ordinarily the theatre was open on three, and sometimes four, nights of the week. During Race and Assize Weeks the company played nightly, and although double salaries were paid to the actors then, these were the only weeks when Wilkinson really made much money.

In the York Library are three of his account books, most beautifully kept, which fully reveal the day to day running of a substantial company. In one of them is a list of fines.

Mr. Simpson was forfeited his Week's salary for refusing to play a small part.

Mrs. Bailey forfeited her Week's salary for refusing to Dance, in *Love in a Village*.

Then at the beginning of each season the company is listed with the weekly salaries paid. Mrs. Jordan said that he was the most honourable manager outside London in point of bargains, and Mathews that he was the most generous manager in the world, but that nevertheless salaries in provincial theatres could only be small. The highest salary ever paid was £1 11s. 6d.

On the 7th January, 1782, there were fifteen actors and nine actresses, ten other people being regularly employed. There are detailed records of everything received and paid out. Two men in a cow get a shilling, a monkey costs another, Bayldon gets 2s. 8d. for whistling, and liquor for the musicians costs 5s. It costs very little to clean the theatre, and a great deal to light it, though some of that outlay is recovered when actors buy the candle ends. Mr. Cummins pays 10s. for thirty of them. A black silk coat and waistcoat seem reasonable at 15s. but it costs £5 3s. 9d. to carry properties from Doncaster to Sheffield.

Each of the actors had two benefit

performances a year, when most could expect to receive from £15 to £30 for each. A few would get between £30 and £40, and playbills show that Wilkinson was very generous about granting a second night to an actor whose benefit failed.

Something of his gift for mimicry seems to be in his writing; by keen observation of detail he swiftly caught

plays. If he watched them at all it was from the gallery, and if any actor offended him he might there instigate the cry of "Hiss him!" Once he was almost thrown out of his own theatre by angry spectators who did not recognise him. Yet his actors wrote of him with a warmth which could only come from affection.

He lived well in York until in 1788



TATE WILKINSON from a portrait in The City of York Art Gallery.

a character or situation. He did not like Garrick, and lets us see him "loll with a lord," or walk the streets with empty pockets so that he can only lament his inability to give to a distressed supplicant. Yet although "Mr. Garrick was an actor on the stage of life," Wilkinson was too honest and revered fine acting too much not to add that "on the stage itself he was not the actor, but life's exact mirror he held to public view."

Wilkinson was very jealous of his position of manager and arbitrary in his decisions over the presentation of

he broke his leg by falling after spending an evening "full of mirth, full of glee, and good cheer" with the Lord Mayor. He never again acted regularly. During his convalescence he wrote his first book of memoirs. "If I had held my PEN but half as well as I have held my BOTTLE—what a charming hand I should have wrote by this time" is the inscription at the front.

His health was not good at the end of his life. Mathews wrote hoping for his recovery, but Tate replied "Do not hope it; it is unkind to wish me to live in pain, and unable to feel enjoyment.



No, my children, I do not wish to live. I should like to stay over the August Race Week to see my old friend Fawcett, and hear how the audience receive their former favourite, and then I shall

be content to die." Soon after the Races he died in York. It was characteristic that he had directed that the theatre should not be closed because of the hardship it would cause to his actors.

## WHICH IS THE OPPOSITE OF PROSE?

By A. L. PATTISSON

**W**HAT is the opposite of verse? Prose. What is the opposite of poetry? Prose. Does this make poetry and prose synonymous? Let us consider.

Each fresh work presented to us by a theatre poet of our day raises a babel of dispute. Discussion group, critic, apologist, journalist, lecturer, man in the queue, all fall to asking or expounding exactly why verse (or poetry) is a better medium for the playwright than prose; or alternatively, exactly why prose would have been as good a medium as poetry (or verse).

Now the curious thing about most of this discussion is that in the words "verse" and "poetry" appear to be completely interchangeable. "Why does he have to write it in verse?" someone will demand. "Surely a chap can ask for his gin just as well in prose?" To which, as likely as not, some knowledgeable fellow will reply, "Because the language of verse is so much more concise. Poetry can speak on two or three levels at once—factual, spiritual, emotional and so on, and so on." This usually silences the diffident questioner who knows he isn't much good at chopping this kind of logic; yet how easily he might have turned the tables on the knowledgeable fellow had he simply asked "Why did you suddenly shift the ground of discussion by speaking in one sentence of 'verse' and in the next of 'poetry,' as though the two words referred to one and the same thing?"

The poets themselves have contributed to the confusion by tending to

write of "poetry in the theatre" and of "verse in the theatre" as though these were inseparable. It is high time they were made separate, even if in the end they may have to be stuck together again.

Poetry, we have been told, carries overtones and undertones of meaning above and below its plain grammatical sense; poetry is a sort of transcendental pun; it is language in depth, language at its most intense; which makes it peculiarly fitted for drama, which is life at its most intense.

Let me illustrate from *Venus Observed*. A duke plans a second marriage with one of his three former mistresses, but leaves his son to choose which lady, and indicate his choice by presenting her with an apple. The moment comes. The son says:—

I'd like it,

Father, if Mrs. Dill would have this apple. She unsuspecting answers:—

I'd like it, too; though it's prettier on the tree.

On the surface level, fruit has been offered and accepted with the casual observation that apples look prettier growing than after plucking; yet to us in the audience has also been conveyed the notion that bodily love has likewise been found prettier before than after the having. The Garden of Eden, the Judgment of Paris, Juno the fruitful mother goddess, all, though unacknowledged, are insinuated into our minds by this little exchange. Yet not a word out of character has been spoken either by the well-bred young man or the kindly, homely woman.

Poetry then has to do with meaning.



Verse on the other hand has nothing to do with meaning; we sometimes speak of nonsense verse. Verse is manipulation of language to make a pattern of sound, a rhythmical pattern called metre, combined with patterns called rhyme, alliteration, assonance, which are made from the consonant and vowel sounds out of which language is constructed. Verse might be called the melody of language, poetry its orchestration.

From this it will be seen that reference to intensity of language, layers of meaning, while explaining the value of poetry in the theatre, in no way explains the value of verse. The dialogue of Tchekov carries its overtones and undertones, but Tchekov does not write in verse; which brings us to the difficult subject of poetic prose. I do not propose to deal with this except to point out that Tchekov did not write in English; that O'Casey and Synge, two other alleged exponents of poetic prose, are both Irish; that, in fact, I cannot recall the name of any English claimant to the title of poetic-prose dramatist. There may well be significance in this.

We English are known for our love of understatement, for saying far less than we mean. We recoil in horror from what we call "high-falutin' talk." How should the normal speech of such a people be capable of layers of meaning? In order to convey the heights and depths of experience of a nation of understaters a new idiom, a new turn of speech has to be fashioned; something quite other than the dialogue of day to day.

Here at once comes trouble. Since the dramatist is making English men and women say the kind of thing that English men and women are not accustomed to say, the actor will find himself without examples of such speech in the life around him on which to model his phrasing and manner of delivery. He will complain he has been given what he calls "literary dialogue," will declare it to be unspeakable, and proceed to

deliver it in such a manner as to make it unacceptable to his audience. Verse is the poet's way of overcoming this.

Mr. Fry writing of his famous sliced prose says that "those who speak it may occasionally find it helpful." Mr. Eliot, more concerned with the unperceived operation of verse on the hearer, suggests that its rhythms working through the more prosaic passages prepare the ear for moments of poetic intensity. Both suggestions are true as far as they go; both need amplification.

To the eye, verse is distinguishable from prose by the way it is placed on the page: besides being cut up into sentences, it is cut up into lines. To a reader, unless he puts up a stiff and conscious resistance, the split second it takes his eye to flick from the end of one line to the beginning of the next will become an additional form of punctuation, a sort of sub-comma. Now the poet who understands his craft is going to take advantage of this and manipulate his dialogue so that what may be termed the dramatic punctuation, as opposed to the grammatical punctuation, falls at the ends of the lines.

I'd like it,

Father, if Mrs. Dill would have this apple. Write this as prose and you get, "I'd like it, Father, if Mrs. Dill would have this apple." In the verse version the word "father" is much more heavily pointed, seeming to say "Father! are you attending?" In the prose version this additional effect goes for nothing. Another way to point particular words is to use assonance or alliteration. "if Mrs. Dill would have this apple." Here the repetition of the vowel sound in "have" and "apple" surely gives both words additional prominence.

By far the most noteworthy of verse effects, however, is rhythm. Speech is dependent on breath; healthy breathing is rhythmical. This is immensely important both to actor and audience. It means that an actor will find lines rhythmically phrased easy to speak, and it means that a theatre audience,

like a musical audience, can be drawn into sympathy with rhythms uttered from the stage, and find itself falling, relaxed, into healthy, even breathing—into a state of well-being in fact—however vexed and strained it may have been by the day's work just left behind.

The poet's job is made easier by the fact that the need to draw breath governs the normal phrasing of every day. He can therefore set a rhythm going in perfectly familiar idiom, for whose manner of delivery ample precedent exists in the life around us; and then, his metre once firmly established, working in it he can lead actor and audience, degree by degree, away from the familiar into the unfamiliar, until they are able to accept as natural an eloquence and lucidity quite beyond the usual range of twentieth-century, tongue-tied English men and women.

Examine the first act of *The Cocktail Party* and note with what skill, even cunning, such a process has been carried out. At curtain-rise we plunge into a painfully unsuccessful party, where well-bred guests, to cover up an awkward situation, are valiantly struggling to keep the ball of vapid party-talk rolling. Their highly mannered, over-emphatic speech, helped in the second line by a couple of italicised words, starts to hammer a metre into our heads. The number of syllables per line may vary considerably, but three heavy stresses are persistently there, and soon the omission or increase of one would cause us as much disquiet as a sudden irregularity of our heartbeat. As we settle to the rhythm the over-emphasis becomes unnecessary and the affectation of the party manners is allowed to give way a little to unobtrusive sincerity, still couched in the most everyday terms.

I know you think I'm a silly old woman  
But I'm really very serious. Lavinia takes  
me seriously.  
I believe that's the reason why she went  
away—

The party breaks up, leaving the uneasy host alone with a man, at first

laconic in the extreme, who almost immediately has taken charge of the conversation (and three-stress metre) employing turns of speech we usually associate with a doctor in charge of a case. A new dimension has been given to the dialogue; the stranger, we perceive, is not merely an unidentified guest, he is also a physician; perhaps a priest as well, or a supernatural power; the voice of God even? The host attempts a protest at his guest's seemingly unwarranted assumption of this strangely authoritative bedside manner. He gets the reply:—

All you wanted was the luxury  
Of an intimate disclosure to a stranger.  
Let me, therefore, remain the stranger.  
But let me tell you, that to approach the  
stranger  
Is to invite the unexpected, release a new  
force,  
Or let the genie out of the bottle.

One force released at this moment, and not again throughout the play securely corked back into its bottle, is the force of poetry.

Mr. Eliot thinks of poetic drama as a social creation. He regards his own and contemporary work as that of the first generation only, and declares his greatest hope is to lay foundations on which others may build. Should this hope be fulfilled it is conceivable, I suppose, that some remote descendants of the present reticent English may grow up so familiar with the rich expressive language the dramatists have forged that daily, in their homes and going about their work, their tongues may habitually wag in poetic prose. Should that unlikely time ever come, theatre poets will then presumably be able to dispense with verse as an aid to the proper delivery and reception of their poetry. In the meanwhile, with communication between man and man still so pitifully fumbling, with the avoidance of tragic misunderstanding by the timely formulation of an adequate phrase still in itself a small Pentecost, the poets would seem to be right to regard verse in our theatre as a necessary adjunct to poetry.

# Theatre Bookshelf

## A New Shakespeare

**William Shakespeare:** The Complete Works, Ed. C. J. Sisson. Odhams. 25s. **Shakespeare Survey**, No. 7, Ed. Allardyce Nicoll. C.U.P. 18s. **The Poetry of Shakespeare's Plays**, by F. E. Halliday. G. Duckworth. 15s. **Old Vic Prefaces**, by Hugh Hunt. Routledge. 16s. **Shakespeare and the Classroom**. Ed. A. K. Hudson. Heinemann. 8s. 6d. **Shakespearian Emendations and Discoveries**, by Howard Parsons. Eltrick. 10s. 6d.

The new one-volume edition of Shakespeare's Works edited by Professor Sisson is a most attractive book, which should be a boon alike to the actor, the reader, and the library. Printed in double columns in clear print, it is easy on the eye and not too voluminous, though it contains many useful extras. Among these is the play of *Sir Thomas More* hitherto only available in the *Shakespeare Apocrypha*, a composite work, some pages of which, now in the British Museum, are believed to be in Shakespeare's handwriting. There is a short biographical essay together with useful introductory notes on the plays, on the text, on editors and editions, on the theatre and the actors, on Shakespeare's language and on music and masque. The preliminary matter to the First Folio is also reprinted. But all these are but adjuncts. For what do we seek in a new edition of Shakespeare? First of all, a text as uncorrupted and critically perfect as modern scholarship can make it. Secondly, an edition presented so that it will be intelligible when spoken and not only when read, so that Shakespeare's lines may live, "Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men."

From these two points of view, the edition deserves the highest praise. "In the emendation of the text," writes the editor in his preface, "proper respect has been paid to the original

texts . . . Some readings, once thought to be corrupt, are now seen to be intelligible on fuller understanding, and are retained." This fuller understanding is due to the study of the Quartos and early editions, of Elizabethan spelling, punctuation and handwriting which has been going forward with such fruitful results since the turn of the century. While no sensational changes have been made, it is fascinating to find how many obscurities have been elucidated thanks to new and better readings. Professor Sisson pays tribute to Pollard, Greg and McKerrow who laid the foundations of bibliographical scholarship in relation to Shakespeare, and made this edition possible, an acting edition as well as a reader's, for the punctuation follows the rhythms of spoken speech, making it easier to understand and to enjoy. An index of characters and a glossary—full of surprising discoveries—completes the work.

*Shakespeare Survey* No. 7 is full of interest as expected and has an important article by Mario Praz on Shakespeare's Italy which should not be missed, showing the poet's local knowledge of Verona, Padua, Mantua and Milan. Was he ever in Italy? The author thinks not, though he may have been acquainted with Italian Renaissance verse. The explanation rather lies in the presence of John Florio in Southampton's household; Florio who was a teacher of French and Italian and ready to supply all sorts of first-hand information on Italy to the poet.

Professor Halliday's delightful book *The Poetry of Shakespeare's Plays* is a labour of love and was, he tells us, six years a-growing and twice re-written before he was ready to print it. "Mountainous and amorphous" in its earlier state it is now a slim book with the distilled wisdom of a lifetime of thought and pleasure in Shakespeare's poetry. The biographical material is

linked to the poetry and takes us easily from the early plays to the last lovely Romances. His comments on that strangely odd play *All's Well that Ends Well* are particularly rewarding.

Unlike this book, which is of permanent value, Mr. Hunt's *Old Vic Prefaces* is only of temporary interest. What a comment on our exhibitionist age is this ephemeral book on seven not-very-good productions, with a few photographs thrown in for good measure! The prefaces were written for the guidance of the Old Vic Company before they started work on the productions, and being merely producer's notes should never have reached the dignity of print. The postscripts are of more interest, for they deal with actual points of production and are neither didactic nor arrogant.

*Shakespeare and the Classroom* is a very different affair. Here is humility indeed, the humility of the teacher who wishes to inspire his class with a real love of Shakespeare and has discovered that to achieve this the plays should be acted by the class and not just read as a task. This is an exciting little book and Mr. Bernard Miles has given it his blessing in a foreword.

In *Shakespearian Emendations and Discoveries* Mr. Parsons has decided that he knows better than all the professors. Good luck to him, he is entitled to his opinions, but he is more convincing on *Kubla Khan* than on Shakespeare.

JANET LEEPER

## Yeats and the Rest

**The Irish Dramatic Movement, by Una Ellis-Fermor. Methuen. 18s.**

To the Irish writer, particularly to the Irish playwright, the history and tradition of the dramatic movement which began at the turn of the century is part of his education. Frequently this education is quite unconscious; he reads, enquires, learns, and thus becomes, again unconsciously, part of the tradition from which he springs. The autobiographies of Yeats, Lady Gregory's works, Malone's *The Irish*

*Theatre* are all out of print, so that the neophyte must in general do his reading in the National Library, that cradle of Irish literature. Too long out of print also was *The Irish Dramatic Movement* by Una Ellis-Fermor, which has now happily, been re-issued in a handsome format at a not unreasonable price.

Calmly and judiciously she examines the growth of the dramatic movement from the first hesitant suggestions of Yeats in the '90's, through the embarrassing co-operation of George Moore to the entrance of Lady Gregory, who was the most unexpected dramatist of them all. It is a curious and inspiring story told in clear, racy prose, though the author has an irritating trick of referring to "amusing" incidents, and then leaving the reader dangling with a footnote reference to an out-of-print work.

Few literary movements have been so well-documented as this. We have the letters and journals of Lady Gregory, the many accounts by Yeats, the charming, if unreliable, reports by Moore, as well as numberless autobiographical references, and the vast, undigested diary of Joseph Holloway now in the National Library. Though they may contradict each other in detail the general picture in all of them is the same, and the figures of Yeats, Lady Gregory and Synge emerge clearly against the Morris wallpaper.

There was something pre-Raphaelite in the passion for collaboration which urged such unlikely companions as Yeats and Moore, Lady Gregory and Douglas Hyde, Edward Martyn and Moore to intertwine their frequently unwilling handwriting on one page. Neither Yeats nor Moore ever recovered from their unsuccessful assault on *Diarmuid and Grania*, and Martyn was somewhat less than pleased when Moore turned his *Tale of a Town* into a superior play called *The Bending of the Bough*. *Diarmuid and Grania* which was lost for many years was unfortunately found in 1946 and in 1951 was published in the *Dublin Magazine*.

As always Yeats emerges as the biggest man of the movement. Synge was a better dramatist and had a better command of stage language; O'Casey had the ear and heart of left-bank Dublin, and Lady Gregory by helping everybody learned more craft than most. But Yeats was the theatre. He was father, son and the holy spirit which inspired it during his lifetime. When he died his kind of Abbey died, and the pre-O'Casey type of play became standard—what I might call the Will Play. I have seldom seen one of these kitchen dramas in which there was not at least one will, which resulted in either comedy or tragedy, frequently in both since an Abbey audience will often laugh through what the author intended as tragedy.

This is an interesting, useful and readable book, equally suited to the bedside table or the reference shelf.

DONAGH MACDONAGH

## U.S. University Presses

**This Music Crept by Me upon the Waters**, by Archibald MacLeish. Harvard University Press. (Cumberlege. 12s.)

**"Modernism" in Modern Drama**, by Joseph Wood Krutch. Cornell University Press. (Cumberlege. 18s.)

**The Theatre of André Gide**, by James C. McLaren. Johns Hopkins Press. (Cumberlege. 24s.)

**The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill**, by Edwin A. Engel. Harvard University Press (Cumberlege. 38s.)

**Box, Pit and Gallery**, by James J. Lynch. California Univ. Press. (C.U.P. 37s. 6d.)

These books, all coming to us from America, testify to the vitality of theatrical scholarship in the United States. Yet I doubt if the scholarship would be so alive if the American Universities had not the resources and the intelligence to give it the benefit of print. Such special themes would hardly tempt the commercial publisher; for a hundred people who enjoy going to the theatre, there is not one who enjoys reading about it. Yet we cannot really understand the trends of the contem-

porary stage unless we know a little of their sources.

Mr. MacLeish is a talented poet and some years ago in his play for radio, *The Fall of a City*, he gave promise of becoming a poetic dramatist. But neither the American stage nor the American radio have done much to encourage that promise. In an interesting preface he looks wistfully, as well he might, to the B.B.C. and complains that only in the smaller, local, semi-amateur and more or less experimental theatres in America can poetic drama get a proper hearing. He might have added that in these circumstances its presentation will probably leave much to be desired. Furthermore, just at the moment when sound radio was beginning to teach people to use their imaginations, television arrived and told them to believe nothing but their eyes. In this context Mr. MacLeish is right to describe vision as "pedantic."

*This Music Crept by Me upon the Waters* is not much more than a skilful piece of atmospherics, rather lacking in that quality of "bidding" which Gerard Manley Hopkins defined as necessary to poetic drama. In some remarks on Mr. Eliot the author wonders whether the prosodic price paid for the success of *The Cocktail Party* was too high. His own prosody, though it is supple enough, does not quite provide the answer to a question which Mr. MacLeish is not alone in asking.

Mr. Krutch's lectures compose an admirable survey of modern drama as an expression of modern thought. In it he sees the classical idea of man questioned by Ibsen, destroyed by Strindberg (who was a Swede, not a Dane), teased by Pirandello, and interminably discussed by Shaw. He discerns some evidence of rehabilitation by O'Neill and Synge; although Synge's poetic vision, which could still make room for irony, was contradicted by the comic realism of the first O'Casey and the dogmatic materialism of the second. The evidence is stronger in the plays of T. S. Eliot, who is the one important

absentee from Mr. Krutch's interesting discussion. This raises, once again, the chief problem of modern literature. If man is deprived of his relation to an absolute, does it matter very much what happens to him? If he is deprived of free-will, does it matter how he behaves? These questions cut to the root of drama. Mr. Krutch abstains from dramatic criticism as such, but he seems a little insensitive to the sheer dramatic rhythm of Chekov's plays. The point about Chekov is not that nothing happens, but that the tiniest ripple of thought or emotion, often repeated for the twentieth time, has a sudden extraordinary significance.

Mr. McLaren gives an account, rather than a criticism, of André Gide's evolution as a dramatist. It is a clear and accurate account, showing how all Gide's plays dramatised, rather coldly, the dialectic of his strange psychology. They represent an effort, sometimes heroic, to escape from the inhibitions of a Puritan upbringing and to achieve what Gide imagined to be a Greek equilibrium. But they are not, remotely, good plays. Gide only really enjoyed talking to himself; to be a dramatist you must enjoy talking to other people. Mr. McLaren does not see, or at any rate does not discuss, this failure. It would be instructive if he, or some other critic, would analyse it.

Mr. Engel gives to Eugene O'Neill a very full and in many respects a subtle consideration. The impression emerges that O'Neill's influence was a triumph of passion rather than of art, of experiment rather than of integration. Here, the Irish ancestry counted for a great deal; beyond the undigested intellectualism of the longer plays was a pathetic and frustrated primitive whom life had torn away from his moorings. Mr. Engel has more space to deploy his arguments than Mr. Krutch, and his discussion is never summary; but his plodding prose wearies us as much as it apparently wearies him.

Mr. Lynch has made a really valuable contribution to social history with

his study of the eighteenth-century London theatre. He reminds us, with many forcible and picturesque illustrations, of how impossible it is to understand the drama without understanding the social and political conditions which produce it. Johnson's moment was a high one for players and a low one for plays. The separation between literature and the stage was hardening after the death of Sheridan, into a nearly permanent divorce.

ROBERT SPEAIGHT

## The Young Idea

*Child Drama*, by Peter Slade. University of London Press. 30s.

This book is an impressive testimony to a high ideal. It represents a supreme statement of protest against the miserable little productions of one-act plays in the Junior School that make mock educationally and artistically, of the drama. Yet the book is far more than a protest. Denigration is not a part of Mr. Slade's mental equipment. With all the faith and conviction of an evangelist the author argues his theme, which is that the drama of children might be, and often is, a thing truly done, the child's faithful expression of his imagination and not the charade-like aping of tricks and forms of speech and behaviour copied, with more or less proficiency, from adults.

Yet Mr. Slade goes a good deal farther than this. "Drama can lend itself to the aims of the school to a greater degree than any other activity. . . . Through drama, the child can be introduced to the richest material in literature, history and human experience throughout the world . . . it can stimulate in the child, as few other media will, creative speaking, creative writing of literature, rhythm and music." (The syntactical uncertainty is typical of much of the writing.)

Now Mr. Slade has clearly not advanced these claims for fun, in a spirit of devilry, to taunt. He believes them. He repeats them continually, and he shows with never-faltering zest



for example and instruction how they may be achieved. Assurance, of all qualities, is not lacking from this book. But I wish from my heart that Mr. Slade had been more considerate to the unbelievers, or (for they are always a greater problem) to the half-believers. Mr. Slade has taken as his province not merely the drama of children but the whole of their young life, their gurgling, slobbering, banging, their knocking down and their building up, their playing in the gutter and their gangsterism, to advance the cause of child drama (sorry, Child Drama) and substantiate his formidable claims for it. But his passion for his subject seems continually to have bedevilled his judgment, and instead of clarity and hard thinking we are constantly faced with confusion. The book is a kind of scissors-and-paste affair of observation, stray thoughts, quotation and experience that elaborate the theme but do not constitute a consecutive argument.

A book of this length needs careful architecture, but a chapter that draws, for example, from the Abydos Passion Play, a Staffordshire Folk Dance, the Japanese Nō plays, the *Commedia dell'Arte*, Terence Gray, Norman Marshall, and a good many other people, places, and things, shakes our confidence in the scholarly judgment of its author instead of impressing us, as it was evidently meant to do, through the wealth of its example. Treatment as well as selection of material is crucial in a book of this kind, and Mr. Slade simply gives away his case to its adversaries, of whom, regrettably, there are still plenty, by using the words "love" and "beauty" so often that the book appears to be smeared with a cloying sentimentality; by using incessantly such expressions as "script play," "language flow," "speech trial," "pattern formation"—a very barbarism of jargon that sounds poorly in a work that makes so much of the beauty of sound. And this book, of which the very pith is sincerity and truth and the

## DENT

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evils of exhibitionism, ends with an astonishing thesaurus of the compliments that have been showered upon the author.

Yet the book, as I have emphasised, is an important one, and I hope it will be widely read. But I also hope that a wide acceptance of its arguments will not lead to a wide acceptance of the manner in which they have been expressed. Sentimentality about children and their drama can be as spiritually destructive as an excess of discipline.

JOHN ALLEN

## The "Complete Guide"

*The Musical Production*, by *Cossar Turfery and King Palmer*. Pitman. 30s.

"Use two halves of a coconut shell for the sound of horses' hooves." Perhaps you already know that? Of course you do. Everybody does. "But what," you may ask, "has this got to do with a book about the production of musicals?" That's what I too am asking. *The Musical Production* is full of this sort of elementary advice. We are even told that "a prompter is essential" and that "good lighting can give character and brilliance to a scene which without it would seem dull and colourless." As the presentation of an operetta or a musical comedy is an elaborate and costly undertaking, one presumes that no amateur society would hand over its production to someone devoid of any knowledge of the theatre. But the authors think otherwise or they would not have taken the trouble to explain that the proscenium is "the frame or arch through which the audience see the show," and then go on to describe the function of the safety curtain.

The musical director also is expected to have neither knowledge nor commonsense. The authors advise that an organist or choirmaster should be chosen as conductor if nobody with previous experience of theatrical conducting is available; but surely no organist or choirmaster needs to be informed that "normally, music has either two, three, or four beats to the

bar," and certainly nobody with any commonsense needs to be warned that "music under dialogue must be played very softly, so that the words are not obscured."

In their preface the authors say they have "sought to cover every aspect of operatic stagecraft"; yet they admit that "in a book of this size it is obviously not possible to treat scenic design and construction, stage lighting, etc., in every detail, but specialised books devoted to these subjects already exist." Then why have they not simply referred their readers to these books and got on with the job of writing about musical production? What is the use of attempting to deal in a few lines each with scene-painting, make-up, properties, and the highly technical subject of the grid and the flying of scenery? This attempt to cover "every aspect" of stagecraft in a couple of hundred pages is unfortunately by no means unique. It is high time that those who write or publish or buy books intended for the amateur should realise that no single volume can be a "Complete Guide." Anyone contemplating adding to the already over-long list of books for the amateur should study those already published and make certain that he has something new to say. There is a real need for a book on musical production and it is because so little has been written on the subject that it is exasperating to find so much space wasted here that the authors have left themselves only one page for revue and another for pantomime.

Among the most useful chapters are those dealing with the formation of an amateur operatic society and choosing a musical show. A chapter on the theatre orchestra contains some valuable information on the orchestral requirements of various musicals, which should have been developed more extensively. The list of some two hundred and fifty musicals "suitable for amateur production" would have been more useful if instead of merely giving the names of the composer and

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**STAPLES**

the copyright owners it had also given some indications of the vocal, orchestral and scenic requirements of each work. Operas, operettas and musical comedies are jumbled together without differentiation, and some of them present problems of casting and staging which make them notoriously difficult for even the wealthiest professional managements. In fact, this is not a list of works suitable, but merely of those available, for amateur production.

The most practical chapter in the book is "Making the Most of a Small Stage," a detailed and well illustrated account of Stanley Haigh's designs for *Cinderella* on a stage with no facilities for flying, a proscenium opening of 25 ft. and a depth of 20 ft. Apart from the drawings accompanying this chapter, the book is illustrated with photographs of professional productions in West End theatres. It would have been more helpful to include photographs of effective amateur productions in theatres less spacious and well equipped than the Coliseum, the Adelphi and the Palace. There is an excellent chapter on how to conduct a lighting rehearsal in a large, fully-equipped professional theatre. The chapter on "The Producer and the Actor" is informative but makes no attempt to deal with the problem of movement and gesture while singing, and devotes only two pages to the production of the chorus.

Although this is a disappointing book, any amateur producer interested in musicals, by picking his way among the platitudes and irrelevancies, will find some sound, practical information. What he will not find is any hint of what makes the difference between a dull, competent done-to-rule production and one which has verve, charm, gaiety and theatrical excitement. The authors may reply that these are qualities which cannot be taught, and to some extent this is true; what worries me is their assumption that by following a few rules, hints, tips and diagrams a perfectly satisfactory production can be

achieved. What the amateur badly needs is a book which seeks to inspire rather than inform, a book which will help him to realise what an exciting adventure rehearsals can become if the imagination is aroused and there is a genuine sense of creation in the collaboration of producer and players.

NORMAN MARSHALL

## Long Plays

**Thirty Pieces of Silver**, by Howard Fast. Bodley Head. 7s. 6d. **Plays, Vol. II**, by Gordon Daviot. Peter Davies. 15s. **Rab the Rhymer**, by Eric Crozier. Garnet Miller. 5s. **Don Juan and Forced to be a Doctor**, by Molière. (English Version, George Graveley.) Cartmel. 6s. **Treasure on Pelican**, by J. B. Priestley. Evans. 5s. **Dr. Morelle**, by Ernest Dudley and Arthur Watkyn. Evans. 5s. **A Gentleman's Daughters**, by Aimee Stuart. Deane. 5s. **Maiden Ladies**, by Guy Paxton and Edward V. Hoile. Deane. 5s. **Crescent Moon**, by Christian Michell. Deane. 5s. **It Never Rains**, by Lynne Reid Banks. Deane. 5s. **A Tale of Two Swans**, by T. B. Morris. Deane. 5s. **Moonshine**, by John Coates. Deane. 5s. **Mother is a Darling!** by Enid Hollins. Deane. 5s. **Storm in a Paint-pot**, by Margaret Gibbs. Deane. 5s. **Atomic Journey**, by James J. Eaton and Michael Juste. Houghton. 3s. 6d.

Witch hunting in America is the theme of *Thirty Pieces of Silver*. The author is a well-known novelist who has himself served a short prison sentence for contempt of Congress. This play has been performed in Melbourne, Sydney, Prague, Pilsen, Warsaw, Berlin, Vienna, Budapest and Moscow, but not in America. It is simple in form and concerns David Graham, a minor Government official in Washington who, to save his own skin, betrays a former friend now under suspicion, by signing a false statement. The colour question is somewhat uncasily tacked on to this theme and the play ends with David's wife leaving him in protest, taking with her their daughter and their coloured maid. It is difficult to believe in these characters, all oddly repellent, who seem to have no life except as mouthpieces for the author's ideas, familiar but earnest. But as Disraeli remarked, "What is earnest is not always true."

The second volume of the late Gordon Daviot's hitherto unpublished plays contains two three-act comedies, a full-length satire and three one-act plays. Gordon Daviot was a gentle dramatist; the worlds of Sartre and Anouilh were not her worlds, but she had a quietly satirical eye which occasionally gives a welcome edge to the writing. *The Pomp of Pomfret* is about the overthrow of an odiously self-important politician. *Cornelia* is an outspoken young woman from Alaska, ward of a sybaritic English bachelor, and the play is

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built up on her effect on him and his immediate circle. *Patria* is a satire on nationalism at its most absurd. The poet, Bergen, has returned from America to Creeland, the home of his forefathers, and stirs up a romantic "Creeland for the Creelanders" movement. This is frustrated by the Emperor of Tainia, the country under whose protection Creeland exists. The theme is lightheartedly treated and makes an entertaining and penetrating play.

Of the one-act plays *The Baluchinnie Bomb* is a comedy about the frustrations of a postman in the remote highlands of Scotland; *The Pen of My Aunt* is a well-written little drama set in Occupied France, and *The Princess who Liked Cherry Pie* is a rehash of the fairy story written in a style which may charm some and irritate others.

Eric Crozier's *Rab the Rhymmer*, a ballad play on the life of Burns, has an engaging simplicity. It would be easily staged and contains twenty-eight of Burns's songs, many of them unfamiliar. Scottish groups will find this play of interest and to help English readers there is a glossary of dialect words.

George Graveley's new renderings of Molière's *Don Juan* and *Forced to be a Doctor* belong to the purist school of translation. In his preface he deplors the fashion for "free adaptation" and states that he has "followed the original as closely as is compatible with ease and actability; two attributes essential in dialogue for the stage." This gallant attempt is not entirely successful. In his translation of *Don Juan* phrases such as "Preserve me from piquing myself on such a false point of honour as fidelity" are unwieldy and do not immediately convey their meaning. But any new translation which will help to make this magnificent play more widely known is welcome indeed.

*Treasure on Pelican*, in which a group of ill-assorted people have gained illicit possession of a treasure, is based on the twin themes of greed and suspicion. Like most of Mr. Priestley's plays it is thoroughly workmanlike and actable, and written with humour and suspense. It is also in the nature of a Cautionary Tale, though the moral is not unduly stressed. It is easily staged and presents no great difficulties of casting and should be widely performed.

Devotees of radio serials will already be familiar with the sardonic Dr. Morelle and the fluttering Miss Frayle and their detective adventures. *Dr. Morelle* is a tautly written "whoandhowdunit" with a cleverly contrived denouement. It has a cast of nine well-defined characters and demands nothing more than a high degree of technical achievement in performance.

"How many things which served us yesterday as articles of faith are to-day mere fables" is the theme of Aimée Stuart's sad little comedy *A Gentleman's Daughters*. The lives of Sir Guy Lycester and his three daughters are

traced from before the first World War down to the present day, and the frustrations, disappointments and missed opportunities so apparent in any review of the passing years are delicately shown.

*Maiden Ladies*, a farcical comedy, plunges us back into that old theatrical world in which light comedy young men and "pokerfaced" valets can masquerade as old ladies upon the flimsiest pretexts. This particular romp is more amusing than many of its kind.

*Crescent Moon* has a farmhouse setting and can, the author claims, be played in any local dialect. Gipsy lore, faith healing, the power of the waxing moon, simple country humour and city-slicker sharp practice are the ingredients of this improbable play.

*It Never Rains*, in which a "lower middle class" Yorkshire family is beset with a sea of troubles has, apart from one improbability, a firm basis of reality. It is a play with a moral. Father who learns that he will never recover the use of his legs after an accident at the works is given a new lease of life by an absorbing mental occupation.

The central figure of T. B. Morris's latest all-woman comedy is Augusta Dewar, an irascible but golden-hearted novelist who takes under her wing Hawthorn Palfrey, a struggling and "difficult" young writer, with results surprising to both of them.

The lighter aspect of twentieth-century witchcraft is the subject of *Moonshine*. Aunt Daisy, an ancient witch from the island of Sark, accompanied by the ghost of a black dog who, in human form, had been one of her admirers, arrives at the London home of her relations to put their affairs in order before her own death, which she has foreseen. Death, of course, does not prevent her from carrying on the good work.

Dulcie Lander, the central figure of *Mother is a Darling!*, is an attractive, impecunious and hopelessly impractical woman, whose husband, years before, had taken the Siamese cat for a walk one night and failed to return. He turns up during the action of the play and this, and her daughters' efforts to find a suitable husband for Dulcie, provide the main comedy situations. *Storm in a Paintpot* is an unpretentious and easily stageable Cockney comedy about individual liberty. Mrs. Pratt paints the front door of her council house tangerine and is involved in an amusing battle with the Authorities who, perhaps symbolically, prefer a uniform dark brown.

The central idea of *Atomic Journey* is an amusing one. A party of highly contrasted types set off in a space ship to reach the moon. The ship crash lands at what they believe to be their destination, but what turns out to be an island in the Outer Hebrides. The construction and dialogue of the play are hardly adequate to support its satirical theme.

DONALD FITZJOHN

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## Shorter Notices

*Shakespearean Stage Production—Then and Now*, by Cécile de Banke (the American edition of which was reviewed in *DRAMA*, Summer 1953) has been published in England. Hutchinson, 25s. *Shakespearean Players and Performances* (reviewed in *DRAMA*, Autumn 1953) is published in England by A. & C. Black, 15s. Methuen's have added *King Henry V* to their Arden Shakespeare series, 15s.

*A D'Oyly Carte Album*, a pictorial record of the Gilbert and Sullivan Operas, by Roger Wood with a foreword by Bridget D'Oyly Carte, has been published by A. & C. Black at 10s. 6d. *Theatre World Annual No. 4*, a pictorial review of West End productions, with a record of plays and players from June 1st, 1952, to May 31st, 1953, has been published by Rockliff at 18s.

Evans Plays have added *A Woman of No Importance* by Oscar Wilde (adapted by Paul Dehn), and *The Bad Samaritan* by William Douglas Home (5s. each) to their library of full-length plays. Samuel French has published *The White Carnation* by R. C. Sherrieff, 5s.

## REPERTORY ENTERPRISE

*Some of the plays given their first production during the first quarter of 1954, compiled from material made available by Spotlight Casting Directory.*

ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE Theatre Royal. Jack Rose Repertory Players. *The Maniac*, by Juan Metaxas. 3 f., 5 m. Set: Room behind bookshop in Charing Cross Road. BROMLEY. *A Hat Hung on Cupid*, by Rodney Diak. 3 f., 7 m. Sport with the immortals. *The Poor Shadow*, by John Croydon and Ursula Tighe Hopkins. 2 f., 6 m. (Time, June 1912.) The solving of the mystery of a death supposedly by food poisoning but really by arsenic.

COLWYN BAY Repertory Players. *Marriage is Marvellous*, by Florence A. Kilpatrick. 6 f., 3 m. House in Hampstead.

CROYDON Repertory Players. *Broken Journey*, by Ivan Butler and Kenneth Watson. 4 f., 5 m. Snowbound coach travellers on New Year's Eve spend the night in a nearby house and are entertained by a young woman who turns out to be the unquiet spirit of a murderess.

HASTINGS Court Players. *Lady! Look Behind You!* by John Clevedon. 4 f., 5 m. Residents' lounge of dowdy hotel near London.

KIDDERMINSTER Playhouse Repertory Players. *Satellite Story*, by Anthony Booth. 4 f., 6 m. Family conflict in East European country.

MANCHESTER Library Theatre. *The Hunters and the Henwife*, by Nicholas Stuart Gray. 3 f., 5 m. A play for children.

STRATFORD, LONDON, E.15. Theatre Royal. Theatre Workshop. *Van Call*, by Anthony Nicholson. 7 f., 11 m.

WOOLWICH R.A. Productions. *Mislike Me Not*, by Earl Courtie. 4 f., 5 m. The theme is the colour bar. *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, by Eugene O'Neill. 1 f., 4 m. First performance in England. Set in lonely farmhouse in Connecticut.

WORTHING Theatre Co. *Silver and Gold*, by Warren Chetham-Strode. 5 f., 5 m. The effect of living under the shadow of the prison on the family of a mental specialist who believes that homicidal maniacs can be cured.

## CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,

Mr. Wynyard Browne, reviewing van Druten's *Playwright at Work*, found no space to comment on the author's advice that playwrights should write not a play but the play, that "the only theme worth having is the one that comes and insists on being written."

It may be that Young Woodley introduced himself with some such impetuous imperative, and we are told that Mrs. Warren similarly accosted G.B.S. But it is difficult to imagine that *A Comedy of Errors* or *Love's Labour's Lost* demanded to be written. Shakespeare knew that they would "go down well"

an excellent, and not, as van Druten supposes, "a perfectly dreadful" reason for writing a play.

It is fortunate that some artists have left records of their urges. Milton heard no divine command to justify the ways of God to man. He wanted to write an epic. Like Tennyson he wisely "went searching for a theme." He turned down several, including the story of the Kings of Israel and Judah, before he decided on *Paradise Lost*.

If a man believes that he can write or paint or sculpt he will not wait for a theme to come knocking at his mind; he will go out into the highways and hedges and compel one to come in. Had playwrights been as diffident as van Druten advises them to be, very few plays would have been written.

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# MEMBERS' PAGES



The Director of the British Drama League gives news of the activities of the League and its Members

## Frances Briggs

On the 1st October 1954 Frances Briggs will have completed thirty-five years' work for the British Drama League. She joined Mr. Whitworth when the newly-formed society was operating in a single room and has watched over its growth ever since. Now she has bought a country cottage and plans to withdraw next autumn from regular work. It is almost impossible to imagine the League without her; but the strength and vitality which must be called into play in its continuance will be due in great measure to her unremitting care and to her friendship with thousands of members. These friends will be given an opportunity to show their feelings for her in response to a special letter from the President and Chairman.

## Generous Gifts

The League badly needs more space at Headquarters, particularly for the Library, the Training Department and the conduct of this magazine. To provide that space means either reconditioning on the existing site or finding better accommodation elsewhere; both are beyond our own resources. Generous help has been given by the Pilgrim Trust in a block grant of £2,000 for Library expansion, the Ministry of Education has contributed to the betterment of premises for Training by making a specific addition to its grant, and Messrs. Littlewoods of Liverpool have made a donation of £50. These gifts, carrying on the help afforded to the Building Fund by our members and with the increased subscription, provide means towards a more efficient and worthy setting for the League's work. We are deeply grateful for them.

## Training the World Over

Frances Mackenzie, Principal of the Training Department, is to spend four months on the other side of the globe. New Zealand's Drama League has flourished exceedingly since 1951 under the Presidency of Stan Campbell, and has now invited Miss Mackenzie to visit every area in the Dominion, to conduct a series of short Drama Schools during June, July and August, and to adjudicate the three Final Festivals in September. We wish her God-speed in this venture.

Of the Summer Schools here in Miss Mackenzie's absence, the first (July 31st-August 14th) will be held in Brighton; students will be accommodated in the Training College, a block of Regency houses on Marine Parade. Mr. Norman Marshall will recreate the period atmosphere by doing scenes from a Regency play; Mr. and Mrs. Martin Browne will do *Murder in the Cathedral* in the Chapel of Brighton College. There will be lectures by guest and staff tutors.

The second School is at Shenstone Training College, Kidderminster (September 3rd-12th), to link up with the Theatre Week at Malvern. Mr. John Izon will be guest lecturer here and will also speak at Malvern. Lecturers from the Theatre Week, and the whole body of delegates, will visit the School; joint excursions have been arranged to Stratford-on-Avon. Shows at Kidderminster Playhouse and Malvern will also be seen.

## 1954 Full-Time Course

As a prose writer fascinated by the theatre I looked for a course for prospective playwrights, but could not find one, and I joined the B.D.L.'s Full-Time Course for Amateur Producers as the nearest approximation. I expected part of its programme to be useful to me, part useless, and the rest boring. For the sake of the first part I decided to endure the boredom and uselessness.

I entered 9 Fitzroy Square on the first day with moderate scepticism, for I was convinced there existed in the world only two kinds of courses. The first was the formal academic kind where bald conceited gentlemen in spectacles, lecturing with creaking voices,

took turns with soured middle-aged ladies who directed punishing glances at anybody inclined to ask questions. The other kind I called in my mind the "Vague Course," where every part of the programme was so jelly-pudding-like, and delivered with so many smiles of tolerance, that one refrained from asking any questions at all and, from sheer pity for the students, played with the idea of setting the building afire—especially if the course happened to be one with students from various countries, complete with community singing, bonfires, folk dances and the inevitable speeches about "our small contribution to a better understanding between the nations."

I had been mistaken: before I had been very long at the B.D.L. I found that a third kind of course did exist. There was nothing useless here, and no time for boredom. I soon discovered that whoever wants to write for the theatre cannot approach the matter in an academic way, but must climb onto the stage. He must act to find out why a particular text is impossible; produce to see what can be brought to life and what will remain dead. He must build stage models and do all the humble things without which a play cannot be performed. This he must do till he has freed himself of literary haughtiness and admits that drama is not literature but *drama*, and that the profoundest thought in the finest language will be worthless and ridiculous in the theatre if not put into an adequate dramatic shape.

That I could take part in all the activities of the Course with pleasure was only partly due to my own interest in the matter. More I owe, and with me twenty-four students from nine countries, to the B.D.L. staff. They were able, under the leadership of that indefatigable lioness, Miss Frances Mackenzie, to make one forget all about the sombre, frost-ridden building and to create a rare unity I had never experienced before: the unity and joy of profound, serious study.

GERARD K. VAN HET REVE

Amsterdam.

## Gertrude Usher: Gordon Douglas

On Saturday, April 3rd, Gordon Douglas presented the trophy in memory of Mrs. Usher, for the creation of which he was responsible, to the winners of the Merseyside Festival, the Bassett Dramatic Company. He was taken ill that night and died on the following Tuesday. All members of the League in the North, and his many friends at Headquarters, will miss him deeply. He had in the last few years been a great strength to the Northern Area as Treasurer, and had been the moving spirit in the revival of the League's activity in West Lancashire and Cheshire. Mr. Cochran, Chairman of our Committee there, will especially feel his loss, and the Finance Committee, on which he was the Northern representative, will sadly miss his

wise, cheerful and friendly counsel. He was a keen supporter of the Playgoers' Club and the Playhouse in Liverpool.

Gordon Douglas himself wrote for us the following tribute to Mrs. Usher, who died at the end of 1953:—

Mrs. Usher had for at least fifty years been actively associated with the theatre on Merseyside, first with the Liverpool Players' Society, one of whose objects was the establishment of a repertory theatre, the Playhouse. When it was opened she became an active member of the Playhouse Circle which was formed to aid and support it. When the Circle closed down she with others founded the Liverpool Playgoers' Club which she served until just before she died. During this long period Mrs. Usher gave a great deal of her time and ability to the work of the British Drama League on Merseyside, first becoming interested when it held its Annual Conference in Liverpool in 1924. For thirty years she held an executive position in its organisation in the North.

## National Final

The Final of the National Festival of Community Drama at the Scala, London, on Whit Monday, June 7th, will have two innovations. To increase the comfort of the audience, the performance will start at 6 p.m. with an interval of half an hour during which refreshments will be available. The adjudication will be conducted as a discussion with the Director (who will not have attended the adjudicators' private deliberations) as an independent Chairman, and a panel of three adjudicators—Miss Margaret Rawlings, Mr. Alan Dent and Mr. John Fernald.

## A Hull Little Theatre

Sixty delegates from the Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain visited the Sizer-Simpson Repertory Company at their own Janus Theatre in February last, when *Cyrano de Bergerac* was produced for the first time in the provinces.

The Janus Theatre was converted entirely by voluntary workers from a derelict Congregational Church. Its stage, which is over 1,000 square feet, with four trapdoors, is well equipped. The Grid has eighteen lines with a "flying" height of 40 ft. above the stage. "Drapes" cost £200; Electrics (with four acting areas, eight spots and sixteen floods) another £200. Eventually the eighteen-way dimmer board will be replaced by a twenty-six-way interlocking system. When the stage was built and the auditorium redecorated the Company had a debt of £1,800 which they had to work very hard to reduce. Although there have been setbacks, such as a gang of youths breaking in, destroying equipment and spilling paint, the Company is undaunted and

hopes to extend its work. As all but one of the legitimate theatres in Hull were destroyed in the Blitz the Janus Theatre has an important role to play in helping to keep the theatre alive in this large city. Nine entries in the National Festival were seen at the Janus in March.

## Stage Presentation

The Betchworth and District Village Drama Festival Committee have, in common with many other festival organisers, been disappointed by the low standard of stage presentation. They realise that as only ten marks are given for presentation, festival teams are likely to concentrate on the other aspects of their entries. The Committee therefore decided to offer a cup for stage presentation. The effect was immediate; at least half the entries in the Festival showed a high standard of décor and some were very good indeed, in particular the Student Players' production of *St. Patrick's Day* which won the Cup. The Betchworth Festival is already known for the high quality of its work and this Cup is a further encouragement to the teams.

STANLEY GARNER,  
Adjudicator of the Festival

## New Drama Associations

The Berkshire County Drama Association was inaugurated at a meeting in Reading University on January 30th. Professor Lee is Chairman and Mrs. Waghorn, our County Representative, is Vice-Chairman. A good attendance from all over the County promises wide support for the first activity, a Drama Day in June. Mrs. Waghorn is in touch with many groups all over Berkshire and is always glad to hear in advance of any productions. Outstanding from the amateur work in the county are Bradfield College with its Greek Theatre, the Unicorn at Abingdon (described in *DRAMA*, Autumn 1953), and the annual open-air Shakespeare done by Herbert and Pauline Lugg at Aston Tirrold.

North Staffordshire formed a Drama Association to do a joint Festival of Britain production in 1951. Now it has become regularly active and ran a most successful first festival in association with the National Festival this spring. The Director gave the first of a series of lectures, and schools are also contemplated. The Civic Authorities of some of the Five Towns are taking a benevolent interest. Under Mrs. Gartside, the able organiser of Arts Council, Arena and Century Theatre tours, the Association has a promising future.

## Magic and Disenchantment

"The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them," says Theseus. "If we shadows have offended . . ." says Puck; thus does Shakespeare, as his *Midsummer Night's Dream* draws

to its magical conclusion take the wind out of critical sails. In the recent performances at Bushey Grammar School these shadows did not offend and only very occasionally was imagination called upon to make slight repairs. This school is too new to have a strong theatrical tradition and Simon Lee's production was an object lesson in what can be achieved by hard work, enthusiasm and above all imagination. The performance had an extraordinary freshness and unity and was blessed with that elusive quality, style. The producer obviously had a clear-cut conception of the play, and the swift action, the plentiful movement, the permanent setting, music, lighting and costumes were all designed to contribute to that conception. Particularly well handled were the unsentimentalised fairy scenes with the delicate comedy of the royal quarrel echoing its more earthy counterpart. It was easy, too, to believe in the tribulations of the four young lovers lost in a forest of echoes and shadows, and the clowns for once were not given undue prominence. Of the performances the players of Puck and particularly Helena must be singled out, but it was as a company that these young actors succeeded.

Nothing could be further removed from the young magic of *The Dream* than the tragic disenchantment of Antony's and Cleopatra's inescapable middle-aged passion. For a school to attempt to stage this play at all shows courage; to perform it well is remarkable. The boys of Alleyn's School, under the enthusiastic direction of Michael Croft, achieved an impressive and very successful performance. The production was excitingly swift-moving, though occasionally derivative. The vast hordes of supers were well drilled and convincing and the lesser roles were singularly free from weak spots, Caesar, Pompey, and in particular Enobarbus, having the ability to project and a sound grasp of character. The Cleopatra was particularly good in her tragic speeches but less so in the lighter moments which were, quite rightly, played for comedy. The tragic heroine was there but not quite the old enchantress. Antony was played with great understanding, maturity and range. I have never heard the "Hark! the land bids me tread no more upon it" scene more movingly played. This is the best heroic actor for his age that I have yet seen.

D.F.

## Malta, G.C.

The Malta Drama League, founded through the inspiration of Frances Mackenzie in 1946, has issued an appeal for donations of money and books on drama to help found a Drama Library, without which its work is severely hampered. This will be the only collection of theatrical books in the Island. Will all who are able to help communicate direct with the Chairman, c/o Royal University Malta Union, 220 St. Paul's Street, Valetta, Malta, G.C.



THE ARREST OF DICK DUDGEON. A scene from Lewes Little Theatre Club's production of "The Devil's Disciple." Photograph by E. A. Meyer.

## News from Montreal

Montreal has no resident professional theatrical company, but an attempt to establish one is being made. Tours from New York are almost a thing of the past, but from overseas we have had Jean-Louis Barrault's Company, and are promised a visit from the *Comédie-française*. *The Father*, presented in Yiddish, and the Salzburg Marionette Theatre's interesting productions of Mozart opera, have to be seen to be believed. What we lose in quantity we almost make up in quality, and certainly in variety.

Most of the plays to be seen in Montreal are presented by amateurs. The majority of the population of over a million are French-speaking, and while some are bilingual there are seldom many French-Canadians at an English play, or vice-versa. The quality of performance and the size of the audience suffer because there are too many small groups presenting plays in English. The leading group is the Montreal Repertory Theatre, though the word "repertory" is scarcely justified because in spite of a great deal of organisation and publicity, M.R.T. is no more than an ambitious amateur group presenting four or five plays a year. They used to have a very good little theatre seating just over 100, but it

was completely destroyed by fire, and a library of some 4,000 volumes (the only theatre library in Canada) was reduced to a mere handful of books.

Until recently M.R.T. had rather an ingenious system. In a season they would do five "major" and three "studio" productions. The "major" were more expensively mounted, tickets were dearer, and the plays themselves, though never of poor quality, were chosen with one eye on what the general public might wish to see. The "studio" productions were of plays which they wanted, or felt they ought to do. During the past two years M.R.T.'s productions have included *Anna Christie*, *Saint Joan*, *Ring Round the Moon*, *The Enchanted*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Pygmalion*, *You Never Can Tell* and *Tartuffe*. Financial difficulties have necessitated a period of retrenchment during which M.R.T. is dispensing with the distinction between "studio" and "major" productions and trying to build up a bigger public.

The oldest amateur group in Montreal is the Trinity Players. They seem to be able to run on from year to year maintaining a good standard of performance, but seldom choosing a play worth doing. This is the more surprising in that Trinity has an active play-reading group, which has recently read *John Gabriel Borkman*, *School for Scandal*, *Pygmalion*.

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THE MOUSETRAP (Agatha Christie)

DEAR CHARLES (adapted from the French by Alan Melville)

FOR BETTER FOR WORSE (Arthur Watkyn)

QUADRILLE (Noel Coward)

THE HAPPY MARRIAGE (adapted from the French by John Clements)

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*Milestones* and *The Late George Apley* (a satire on Boston society), a sound if conventional list.

There are fewer French amateur groups than English, despite the larger French population, but their quality is higher. *Les Compagnons*, now defunct, had a very fine record; one of their last productions was Pirandello's *Henry IV*. *Le Theatre du Nouveau Monde* is now the leading French group. Last season's programme included *The Gentle People*, *Don Juan* and *The Playboy* (if Synge's idiom does not defy translation!). It is a curious thing that the French groups seldom perform modern French plays but often present such things as *Un Inspecteur Vous Demande*, *drame de J. B. Priestley*, while their English-speaking rivals are attracted to Giraudoux and Anouilh. Last week, for example, McGill University Players gave a very sensitive performance of *Point of Departure* in arena style.

Most amateurs engage professional producers. The choice of plays is perhaps a little better than among amateurs at home; acting standards not any higher, but décor usually superior to that of the average amateur production in Scotland at all events.

So although the professionals do not come here very often, the theatre goes on.

J. W. BROWN

## Umtali Theatre

We have more or less raised sufficient funds to erect and equip a theatre here at a cost of £35,000. As no money has been raised on loan there will be no repayments of capital or interest, and all income will be available for maintenance, insurances, rates, replacement of equipment, new scenery, and so on. It is hoped that from time to time there will be sufficient surplus to establish a bursary for Rhodesians to study dramatic art, ballet, or music, either here in the Union of South Africa or overseas.

To meet the overheads we hope to let the theatre to other societies, professional and amateur, or for Conferences. In addition our funds will be augmented by the performances from our own shows. At present we put on about four a year and the net profit is about £150 per show.

The active membership of the Society is relatively small and the population of Umtali, man, woman and child, is only about 6,000. Though we have only a few reasonably competent producers, our aim is to maintain a high standard of production, a reputation for which we already enjoy. We therefore feel that we would limit our productions to five or six shows a year. In addition we will endeavour to obtain the services of first-class artists such as Kendall Taylor and others, who have from time to time appeared in Umtali on our behalf.

A. LAWTON

## Australian Theatres

At the turn of the century Australia was well equipped with theatres. Sydney had eight, whereas now it has only three, mostly given up to vaudeville or musical comedy, and those who make playing their profession mainly get their living in radio. "Live" straight plays are therefore produced by amateur groups (in Australia "repertory" is amateur), a strong and increasing element in our community life. Their problem is *where to play*.

With the old theatre buildings pulled down or given over to films, they have had to take refuge in whatever they could find—basements, upper rooms, multi-purpose church or municipal halls. Here and there a group has acquired and adapted its own premises, and in some States ambitious building schemes have been launched. A flying visit to Adelaide and Perth has enabled me to learn at first-hand what is being done in those capitals. Their plans have several points in common.

The Adelaide Repertory used to play in the old Tivoli Theatre. This having been sold the Society acquired a good central site and have already collected nearly half the £50,000 needed for a well-designed theatre seating about 750, with accommodation for rehearsals, workshop and clubrooms. It is hoped to open this in 1956, and meanwhile the Society—the oldest and largest of Australian Repertories—is giving its performances in a suburban town hall and so keeping its membership together.

In Perth the Repertory Club has a fifty years' lease of church property in Pier Street. With its appeal to build a theatre only just launched it had in February £8,000 in hand and a credit from the State Government repayable in instalments over the fifty years with 5 per cent. interest. The Club proposes to play for about half the year, making its theatre available for hire during the rest. It co-operates closely with the Company of Four, which acts on professional terms for the Adult Education Board, in such matters as casting, and the pooling of wardrobes and props.

As Perth already has one of the best-appointed and best-run professional theatres in Australia available to such visiting companies as the Old Vic, and its university possesses in the Somerville Auditorium and the Sunken Garden two delightful open-air theatres which, thanks to the equable climate, can be in practically constant use during the summer months, the problem of where to play seems to be nearer solution in the capital of Western Australia than elsewhere on our Continent, with the possible exception of Hobart, whose Theatre Royal is Australia's first National Theatre building.

One notes a recurrence of the age-long pattern of development. In England drama, the nursing of the Church, went to school



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with the universities. In Australia churches and universities have helped in solving the drama's housing problems. In the Union Theatre at Melbourne University, a professional repertory company plays for seven months each summer, leaving the premises free for student and other societies during the winter. Local Government Authorities are waking up to the idea of drama as a communal activity, and when they build halls are giving more thought to stage and backstage accommodation. But amateur drama must also display a capacity for self-help, and is so doing. At Kalgoorlie (W.A.), Orange (N.S.W.) and Canberra (A.C.T.) groups have built or converted premises for their own use, partly with the labour of their own hands, and at Southport (Queensland) the local branch of the Returned Soldiers' League is financing a theatre project on a scale comparable to any in capital cities.

By way of footnote: Children's theatre in this country has largely been the affair of strolling players. During the first five years of its existence the Australian Children's Theatre, which has performed to over 400,000 children in five States, has had a caravan as its movable base. It has now acquired permanent headquarters by building A.C.T. House in Melbourne as its point of departure and return.

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